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ABSTRACT

Educational equality for migrant youth has not been realized in American society. By grade 10, 80-90% of migrant youth drop out of school. When migrants drop out, they are academically 1 to 2 years behind other students their age. They have limited English skills, poor self-concepts, few job skills, and no career plans. The National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education made dropout prevention and retrieval top priorities in the late 1970s and developed the Migrant Dropout Youth Program (MDYP) with the goal of increasing the number of migrant youth who resume school or vocational education and/or pursue education beyond the secondary level. MDYP services include counseling, career education, a newsletter, and a toll-free telephone number. Once migrant youth have made career decisions, they are linked with the most appropriate educational or training program. Even with the expanding efforts of the MDYP, the needs of migrant youth remain largely unmet. Educational and vocational training opportunities must be developed for them to provide the assistance they need to set and achieve career goals to become fully functioning contributors to society. (JHZ)

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A HARVEST OF EQUITY

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A HARVEST OF EQUITY

Twenty five years ago, Edward R. Morrow traveled into the fields and produced a documentary film which shocked the nation. The title was The Harvest of Shame. This film illuminated the social and economic injustices suffered by the migrant workers of the 1960's. (CBS, 1960).

This year CBS News followed up on that report and found little or no change in the living and working conditions of the migrant (CBS, 1985). Rate, lack of hot water and toilet facilities, long hours, sub-minimum wages, use of poisonous chemicals and exploitation by crew leaders are still common factors in a migrant's work-place and in the camps in which they live. (Goldman, 1984).

The average income for a migrant family of six, often with children working, is \$3,900.00 annually. (Moore, 1985). They often receive far less than they earn because of the unauthorized deductions taken out for food and housing. (Noonan, 1984).

In 1984, a Pennsylvania joint-House subcommittee heard testimony from over one-hundred (100) migrant farmworkers which documents the lack of change.

Farmworkers told that committee that:

- a) men and women worked 75-85 hour/week,
- b) they were overcharged by the crew chief for staple foods,
- c) they received only a portion of their paycheck since the crewleader received all their checks and made deductions from them prior to remitting the balance to them,
- d) they lived 40 workers to one trailer with children sleeping 3 - 4 to a bed,
- e) they had no privacy or decent toilet facilities. (Taylor, 1984).

An extreme example of neglect was found in Michigan this year where a crew was abandoned in a camp. Officials said the crew was recruited from Chicago, Illinois and Atlanta, Georgia and received no pay for the year and a half period they worked for the farm. (AP, 1986).

Last year, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) reviewed the data it collected on the living and working conditions of migrants and compared these conditions to the health standards established for farm workers in 1981. They found most health standards had not been implemented and that the incidence of gastrointestinal disorders was 107 times more prevalent in migrant workers than in urban poor. (Charlip, 1984). These illnesses were believed to be a direct result of the poor sanitation conditions in the fields and camps. Another health hazard comes from the use of pesticides in the fields; some workers were not told when the crop would be sprayed or were not notified that the fields were recently sprayed. The consequences to workers ranged from skin rashes and ulcerations to vomiting, tiredness and cold-like symptoms, and in some cases, convulsions and death. (Ketcham-Colwell, 1984). To date the rate of cancer and birth defects related to the use of these poisonous chemicals remains undocumented. Most migrant workers receive no Workman's Compensation to cover these health effects despite the fact that they contribute to this fund (Migrant Legal Aid, 1985).

These families contribute to the nation's welfare performing back-breaking labor at subsistence wages to put food on the nation's table, (Moore, 1985). As a consequence, the average life expectancy for the migrant worker is 43 years (). Clearly, "a harvest of shame" still exists.

This labor force is unique. Migrants work in the citrus groves of Florida and California, the potato fields of Wisconsin, Idaho, and New York, the apple orchards of Michigan, Pennsylvania, Washington state and Colorado, the shellfish beds of Texas, Louisiana and Maryland, and in the lumber harvest and on animal processing farms in states in between. Thus, this national labor force should be a national concern. They are an integral part of today's agricultural industry. But their lives are relatively unchanged from the lives of the

migrants Steinbeck wrote about in the Grapes of Wrath.

Steinbeck's migrant families came out of the dust-bowl of Oklahoma in the 1930's. Today's migrants are poor white "mountain" people, ethnically related to the "old stock Yankee" who settled in this country generations ago. They are poor black tenant farmers, descendent from slaves (ESCAPE, 1983). They are hispanics, legal immigrants, or illegal refugees from politically-torn countries. They are many colors, and they differ culturally, but they share the common bonds of poverty, mobility, social-isolation, and political powerlessness. As Robert Coles reported in 1982 on the plight of the migrant:

No group of people I have worked with... tries harder to work, indeed travels all over the country working, from sunrise to sunset, seven days a week. There is something ironic and special about that: In exchange for the desire to work, for the terribly hard work of bending and stooping to harvest our food, these workers are kept apart like no others, denied rights and privileges no others are denied, denied even half-way decent wages, asked to live homeless and vagabond lives, lives of virtual peonage.

I do not believe the human body and mind were made to sustain the stresses the migrant must face... I fear what it does to men, women, and especially the children (ESCAPE, 1983).

These factors severely impact on the learning process of migrant children. Because the children must move with their families for economic survival, they regularly leave school early and return back home to find classes already full. Too many times they are placed in classes not upon their individual needs but the needs of the school to maintain reasonable class sizes and teacher loads.

In an attempt to make educational opportunities more equitable for these youth, Congress passed a special amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1966. It set aside funds for supplemental instructions

and support services. The design of each states' Migrant Education Program provides for remediation of some of the effects of poverty and frequent interruptions to regular education programs (Plaquemines-Gazette, 1984), and is reflected in their motto: A Harvest of Hope.

Yet, when migrant youth reach 15-16 years of age; when middle American youth are thinking of proms or drivers' licenses, Migrants begin to think of earning a living. (Onstad, 1984). Eighty to ninety per cent of migrant youth will dropout of school by grade 10. Frustrated by that time, they leave school academically one-to-two (1-2) years behind students their same age, with limited English skills, and poor self-concepts. They profess that they dislike school, but many place more value on economic independence than education, believing they can either help their families economically by going to work or leave home, go out on their own and do better than their families financially.

Although some conflicts with their parents may be minimal initially because they are free to work, they have no career plans. They have little or no job skills. In fact, they exhibit qualities employers dislike in applicants, e.g. poor academic records, poor language skills, etc. (CAM, 1985). Migrant dropouts will not find employment in the regular job-market, even if they choose to try.

All dropouts cost our economy. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) reported in June of last year that high school dropouts will earn an estimated \$237 billion less than their high school classmates who graduate over their life-times. This under-employment will result in a loss of \$71 billion in state and local tax revenues. (Mann, 1986).

Along with the effect on the tax base, Social Security Benefits will be effected by our dropout rates. By 1992, each Social Security recipient will rely solely on the contributions of three workers. One of those workers will be a minority (IEL, 1986) - perhaps a migrant.

Since dropouts also have higher unemployment rates they may become burdens on our society. Crime, welfare claims, substance and child abuse rates are all related to the economic and educational levels of a people. A visit to a local jail will show the majority of inmates are functional illiterates. Yet it costs \$25,000.00 per year to house an inmate in jail - three times as much as a year of education at a state college. (Mann, 1986).

The National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education programs (NASDME) realized the cost-effectiveness of investing in dropout retrieval at the end of 1970's. Addressing the issue in a series of symposiums, forums and workshops co-sponsored by the Educational Commission of the States (ECS) NASDME placed dropout prevention and retrieval at the top of their priority list before A Nation at Risk brought this problem to public attention. (NASDME, 1981).

One program response expanded as a result of the NASDME position is the Migrant Dropout Youth Program. (MDYP). Begun as a local impetus in Geneseo, New York, the model grew to serve the Eastern Stream (East Coast) migrant dropouts and now serves the nation's migrant dropouts. MDYP attempts to provide a Harvest of Equity.

The program has one goal - to increase the number of migrant youth who resume secondary or vocational education and/or pursue education beyond the secondary level. The accomplishment of this goal requires agreements and cooperation among states.

Personnel located on each of the major migration streams identify, enroll and provide counseling to migrant dropouts. Youth work with MDYP facilitators to explore careers, learn career decision-making strategies and goal-setting techniques. They are also encouraged to work on personal problems which might effect their future.

Along with personal visits by the facilitators, the program provides information to youth via a bi-monthly newsletter. Real Talk is written for migrant dropout youth and contains regular features on careers, health concerns, and educational opportunities. It also contains a toll free telephone number known as the Hot line.

Youth can use the Hot-line number from anywhere in the continental United States to call the Migrant Resource Center. Youth workers who answer can continue to provide dropouts with moral support and information on educational and vocational programs. An answering service maintains the lines in the evening so youth can feel confident they are only a phone message away from assistance when they need help.

Once the youth have made their career decisions they are linked with the most appropriate educational or training program. All barriers to program participation are taken into consideration when program placements are made. Academic levels, aptitudes, interests, performance levels, geographic preferences and program duration are all considered when placing migrant youth into programs.

MDYP then provides directly, or links with existing agencies and programs which provide, continued support to youth during their training. Some alternative programs with whom MDYP has cooperative agreements are:

JTPA - Job Training and Partnership Act programs.

TELAMON CORPORATON - funded by 402 funds of JTPA for migrant/seasonal workers.

ABE/GED - adult basic and high school equivalency degree programs at local school.

HEP/CAMP - high school equivalency and first year college programs housed at University and College campuses throughout the nation.

RVI - regional vocational training institutions and local programs.

TRIO - in-school programs which provide assistance to low-income/disadvantaged youth.

But even with the expanding efforts of the Migrant Dropout Youth Program our harvest of hope and equity is Baracidal. Youth who no longer travel with their family may be missed in receiving states and leave those states without contact. Many crews of young dropout men are never recruited at all because crew leaders and farmers fear reprisals from authorities from the department of labor, health or immigration.

So, we are left with a challenge to provide the harvest of equity...

As educators we are challenged by Wendell Bell's statement:

Adolescents who foresee themselves as becoming members of the manual working class see no clear relation between what they are doing in school and their future occupational status. Thus, their current performance in school loses meaning and current self-restraint is perceived as irrelevant to the achievement of long-range goals.
(Learning for Tomorrow, Toffler)

As business' and industry's potential employers, we are challenged by Harold Hodgkinson's 1986 report which stated:

The United States is becoming more and more dependent on a smaller, increasingly minority and poor youth population. (Institute of Educational Leadership, 1986).

But most of all as people of an abundant society we are challenged by the concern of a migrant mother:

It's the worst of being a mother, (being a migrant), knowing that you can't offer your babies much... I know it's going to be bad for them when they grow up... There'll be a moment when I'll look at my children and wonder if they hold it against me for bringing them into the world like we do.

...Once when I was little I seem to recall asking my uncle if there wasn't something you could do, but said no there wasn't and to hush up. So I did. Now I have to tell my kids the same, that you don't go around complaining - you just don't.

or by the chagrin of the migrant father:

If my child looks right up at me and says he thinks we live a bad life and he thinks just about every other child in the country is doing better than he is- I mean has a better life- then I don't know what to say except we're hard working and we do what we can... there's no point in feeling sorry for yourself, because you can't change things, no you can't and all you can do is say to yourself that that's true, that we've got a long road to hoe and the Lord sometimes seems to have other, more important things to do than look after us... (ESCAPE, 1983)

The challenge left us is this: To provide the educational and vocational training opportunities required by these people; To develop and maintain these options if they are not now available, and to continue to provide migrants with the assistance they need to set and achieve their career goals, so they can become a fully-functioning resource in our society.

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